

(c) *Other evidence of death.* If you cannot obtain the preferred evidence of a person's death, you will be asked to explain why and to give us other convincing evidence such as: the signed statements of two or more people with personal knowledge of the death, giving the place, date, and cause of death.

§ 404.721 Evidence to presume a person is dead.

If you cannot prove the person is dead but evidence of death is needed, we will presume he or she died at a certain time if you give us the following evidence:

(a) A certified copy of, or extract from, an official report or finding by an agency or department of the United States that a missing person is *presumed to be dead* as set out in Federal law (5 U.S.C. 5565). Unless we have other evidence showing an actual date of death, we will use the date he or she was reported missing as the date of death.

(b) Signed statements by those in a position to know and other records which show that the person has been absent from his or her residence and has not been heard from for at least 7 years. If the presumption of death is not rebutted pursuant to § 404.722, we will use as the person's date of death either the date he or she left home, the date ending the 7 year period, or some other date depending upon what the evidence shows is the most likely date of death.

(c) If you are applying for benefits as the insured person's grandchild or stepgrandchild but the evidence does not identify a parent, we will presume the parent died in the first month in which the insured person became entitled to benefits.

[43 FR 24795, June 7, 1978, as amended at 60 FR 19164, Apr. 17, 1995]

§ 404.722 Rebuttal of a presumption of death.

A presumption of death made based on § 404.721(b) can be rebutted by evidence that establishes that the person is still alive or explains the individual's absence in a manner consistent with continued life rather than death.

Example 1: Evidence in a claim for surviving child's benefits showed that the worker

had wages posted to his earnings record in the year following the disappearance. It was established that the wages belonged to the worker and were for work done after his "disappearance." In this situation, the presumption of death is rebutted by evidence (wages belonging to the worker) that the person is still alive after the disappearance.

Example 2: Evidence shows that the worker left the family home shortly after a woman, whom he had been seeing, also disappeared, and that the worker phoned his wife several days after the disappearance to state he intended to begin a new life in California. In this situation the presumption of death is rebutted because the evidence explains the worker's absence in a manner consistent with continued life.

[60 FR 19165, Apr. 17, 1995]

§ 404.723 When evidence of marriage is required.

If you apply for benefits as the insured person's husband or wife, widow or widower, divorced wife or divorced husband, we will ask for evidence of the marriage and where and when it took place. We may also ask for this evidence if you apply for child's benefits or for the lump-sum death payment as the widow or widower. If you are a widow, widower, or divorced wife who remarried after your marriage to the insured person ended, we may also ask for evidence of the remarriage. You may be asked for evidence of someone else's marriage if this is necessary to prove your marriage to the insured person was valid. In deciding whether the marriage to the insured person is valid or not, we will follow the law of the State where the insured person had his or her permanent home when you applied or, if earlier, when he or she died—see § 404.770. What evidence we will ask for depends upon whether the insured person's marriage was a ceremonial marriage, a common-law marriage, or a marriage we will deem to be valid.

[43 FR 24795, June 7, 1978, as amended at 44 FR 34493, June 15, 1979]

§ 404.725 Evidence of a valid ceremonial marriage.

(a) *General.* A valid *ceremonial marriage* is one that follows procedures set by law in the State or foreign country where it takes place. These procedures cover who may perform the marriage ceremony, what licenses or witnesses

are needed, and similar rules. A ceremonial marriage can be one that follows certain tribal Indian custom, Chinese custom, or similar traditional procedures. We will ask for the evidence described in this section.

(b) *Preferred evidence.* Preferred evidence of a ceremonial marriage is—

(1) If you are applying for wife's or husband's benefits, signed statements from you and the insured about when and where the marriage took place. If you are applying for the lump-sum death payment as the widow or widower, your signed statement about when and where the marriage took place; or

(2) If you are applying for any other benefits or there is evidence causing some doubt about whether there was a ceremonial marriage: a copy of the public record of marriage or a certified statement as to the marriage; a copy of the religious record of marriage or a certified statement as to what the record shows; or the original marriage certificate.

(c) *Other evidence of a ceremonial marriage.* If preferred evidence of a ceremonial marriage cannot be obtained, we will ask you to explain why and to give us a signed statement of the clergyman or official who held the marriage ceremony, or other convincing evidence of the marriage.

§ 404.726 Evidence of common-law marriage.

(a) *General.* A *common-law marriage* is one considered valid under certain State laws even though there was no formal ceremony. It is a marriage between two persons free to marry, who consider themselves married, live together as man and wife, and, in some States, meet certain other requirements. We will ask for the evidence described in this section.

(b) *Preferred evidence.* Preferred evidence of a common-law marriage is—

(1) If both the husband and wife are alive, their signed statements and those of two blood relatives;

(2) If either the husband or wife is dead, the signed statements of the one who is alive and those of two blood relatives of the deceased person; or

(3) If both the husband and wife are dead, the signed statements of one blood relative of each;

NOTE: All signed statements should show why the signer believes there was a marriage between the two persons. If a written statement cannot be gotten from a blood relative, one from another person can be used instead.

(c) *Other evidence of common-law marriage.* If you cannot get preferred evidence of a common-law marriage, we will ask you to explain why and to give us other convincing evidence of the marriage. We may not ask you for statements from a blood relative or other person if we believe other evidence presented to us proves the common-law marriage.

§ 404.727 Evidence of a deemed valid marriage.

(a) *General.* A *deemed valid marriage* is a ceremonial marriage we consider valid even though the correct procedures set by State law were not strictly followed or a former marriage had not yet ended. We will ask for the evidence described in this section.

(b) *Preferred evidence.* Preferred evidence of a deemed valid marriage is—

(1) Evidence of the ceremonial marriage as described in § 404.725(b)(2);

(2) If the insured person is alive, his or her signed statement that the other party to the marriage went through the ceremony in good faith and his or her reasons for believing the marriage was valid or believing the other party thought it was valid;

(3) The other party's signed statement that he or she went through the marriage ceremony in good faith and his or her reasons for believing it was valid;

(4) If needed to remove a reasonable doubt, the signed statements of others who might have information about what the other party knew about any previous marriage or other facts showing whether he or she went through the marriage in good faith; and

(5) Evidence the parties to the marriage were living in the same household when you applied for benefits or, if earlier, when the insured person died (see § 404.760).

(c) *Other evidence of a deemed valid marriage.* If you cannot obtain preferred evidence of a deemed valid marriage,